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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KINSHASA 001019

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KPKO](#) [CG](#)

SUBJECT: ITURI UPDATE: STATUS OF EFFORTS TO RELEASE MONUC
PEACEKEEPERS

REF: A. KINSHASA 1004

[B](#). KINSHASA 898

[C](#). KINSHASA 851

Classified By: PolOff CBrown, reasons 1.4 b/d.

[1](#). (C) Summary: The June 27 release of two MONUC Nepalese peacekeepers held by militia leader Peter Karim (ref A) comes after a series of intense negotiations between the militia leader and GDRC officials. According to MONUC and Congolese military officials in Bunia, efforts are still underway to convince Karim to release unharmed the five remaining peacekeepers in captivity. Karim, however, is still making demands of MONUC and the GDRC, none of which are likely to be granted. End summary.

[2](#). (C) Before the June 27 release of two of the seven Nepalese peacekeepers being held hostage, MONUC officials had received prior confirmation that all seven of the hostages were alive. According to MONUC-Bunia Head of Office Charles Gomis, the MONUC Nepalese battalion commander spoke via telephone June 22 with two of the hostages and learned that all were in "good condition." MONUC Chief Military Information Officer Lt. Col. Mike Burke said MONUC had specifically provided a satellite phone to Karim, via negotiators, so MONUC officials could communicate with the hostages.

[3](#). (C) The negotiators currently working on MONUC's behalf with Karim include two members of the National Assembly from Ituri District, both of whom are from the Lendu ethnic community (reportedly the same ethnicity as Karim). Ituri District Commissioner Petronille Vaweka has also been involved in the discussions. Gomis said, however, that it has been the two parliamentarians, not Vaweka, who have been in direct contact with Karim. Vaweka and the two representatives traveled to Kwandroma (approximately 60 miles northeast of Bunia) June 23 to engage in a new round of dialogue with Karim to secure the release of the peacekeepers. One of these mediators, Bura Pulunyo, said June 27 the negotiations were "really tough" and that the mediators did not sleep for three days.

[4](#). (C) This new group of interlocutors came about after several failed attempts by other Ituri community representatives to deal with Karim. As reported ref B, the Djugu territory administrator tried to offer Karim USD 515 to release the peacekeepers, but the offer was rejected. (Note: Karim originally demanded USD 20,000 per hostage after they were first captured. End note.) After this aborted attempt, Vaweka joined in the efforts, along with several members of

the Lendu community. According to MONUC officials in Bunia, however, Karim demanded that "higher-level" GDRC officials become involved in the negotiations. It was at this point MONUC asked the two National Assembly representatives to take part.

15. (C) According to sources in the local NGO community in Bunia, who have contacts in the area where Karim and his militia operate, the hostages themselves have been living in poor and unsanitary conditions since being taken. In addition, the militia reportedly took away the peacekeepers' shoes so they could not run away. One NGO source said the peacekeepers have been split into two groups, and both are being moved constantly to avoid being captured by MONUC.

16. (C) Gomis and other MONUC officials said Karim has largely dropped his original demand for money for the release of the hostages. Gomis said MONUC will never pay a ransom, regardless of how much Karim demands. NGO sources in Bunia reported that Karim and his militia have quietly sent out messages through the Ituri community that they would be willing to accept a total of USD 20,000 to release the peacekeepers. The same NGO sources also reported that a widespread rumor in Ituri is that the Nepalese government is willing to pay a ransom for the release of the peacekeepers; MONUC officials denied, however, that any such offer has been made. Ituri Brigade Commander General Mahboob Haider Khan said Karim is insisting as well that he be made a general in the Congolese military and be allowed to enter the military integration process. Gomis said he believes Karim is searching for some kind of "respect" for his actions, though Gomis added that neither MONUC nor the Congolese military are inclined to accede to Karim's request.

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17. (C) Regarding any possible outside assistance to Karim, MONUC officials in Bunia said they were all convinced Karim is acting alone. General Mahboob told PolOff MONUC has information that militia leader Bosco Taganda called Karim two weeks ago to offer support. Mahboob insisted, however, that there is no evidence Bosco and Karim have met, nor that Bosco has provided Karim with any weapons or materiel since the seizure of the hostages May 28. Moreover, Mahboob and Gomis both said there is no evidence that rebel General Laurent Nkunda has contacted Karim, directed the capture of the peacekeepers, or provided assistance of any kind. Mahboob added, though, that MONUC and the FARDC have received reports of some militia members from the Patriotic Force of Resistance in Ituri (FRPI) south of Bunia moving north towards Karim's position near the Djugu-Mahagi border, supposedly in an effort to reinforce Karim's Front for National Integration (FNI).

18. (C) MONUC and FARDC officials also said Karim has been making false accusations about the Congolese military attacking him since he took the hostages. Gomis and Mahboob said Karim has called MONUC-Bunia headquarters several times in the last month complaining that the FARDC has been attacking his militia forces, which he considered a sign of "bad faith" by MONUC and the FARDC. General Bwanya Nsiona, the FARDC operations commander in Ituri, said Karim's allegations are false, and in fact, it has been Karim's forces who have been attacking the Congolese military near Fataki and Nioka.

19. (C) MONUC Ituri Brigade Commander General Mahboob said MONUC is willing to let the negotiations play out and see what results from them. (Note: This comment was made before the June 27 release of two of the hostages. End note.) However, if these negotiations fail, Mahboob said MONUC has plans ready to react militarily and rescue the hostages.

110. (C) Mahboob said MONUC is also currently investigating how exactly the hostages were taken. Mahboob said he still believes the operational security of the mission was

compromised (ref C). Mahboob explained that when the peacekeepers were taken, there were "some 500 to 600" militia members in Tsupu waiting to attack MONUC troops. Mahboob said he believes this clearly indicates information was leaked, mostly likely by the FARDC, to the militia in advance of the operation. Mahboob criticized, though, unnamed MONUC officials for insisting he organize the original mission for the Nepalese peacekeepers "on short notice," without any opportunity to conduct a reconnaissance mission in advance. Mahboob said the paucity of pre-mission planning may also have contributed to the peacekeepers getting ambushed.

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